

Cultural Daily

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Hollywood Bowl fireworks: God Save the Tsar!

R. Daniel Foster · Thursday, August 30th, 2018

Russia's fierce national pride was on display this past weekend at the Hollywood Bowl's enduring crowd-pleaser "Tchaikovsky Spectacular with Fireworks," conducted by Gustavo Dudamel leading the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Russian's national anthem, "God Save the Tsar," provided a bookend for the evening. Its theme figured both in the program's opener, Tchaikovsky's Marche Slave, as well as in the 1812 Overture finale. As always, the overture was paired with pyrotechnics, and to fully punctuate the boom: the USC Trojan Marching Band.

Emotional Russians give to the cause

Dudamel hammered Marche Slave's fierce Serbian folk song themes; the piece was composed for an 1876 benefit concert for wounded Turko-Serbian war soldiers. It's difficult to imagine a march that equals the pummeling patriotic fervor of Marche Slave – upon hearing it, emotional Russians rushed to empty their pockets for those maimed soldiers.

But of course, the evening began, as it always does at the Bowl, with "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Moving on from wry observations made during troubled times: the program's middle was decidedly Shakespearean. Tchaikovsky's Hamlet Fantasy-Overture was followed by Romeo and Juliet Fantasy-Overture.

Actors performing scenes from Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet preceded the pieces. The Romeo and Juliet Fantasy-Overture was the optimal melodic counterpoint to both Marche Slave and the 1812 Overture, its rapturous passages handled with a kind of ineffable deftness by the Dudamel-led orchestra, known for working hand in glove. The Capulet-Montague battle theme was also finely etched, and with the actor-performance set-up, one could imagine being in Verona, and maybe even taking sides.



Conductor Gustavo Dudamel leads the LA Phil / Photo courtesy Los Angeles Philharmonic

Tchaikovsky's deep wound

The tragic story mirrors Tchaikovsky's. The composer was consumed with love for Eduard Zak, a 15-year-old cousin of one of his students who later committed suicide. From Tchaikovsky's 1887 diary entry:

“How amazingly clearly I remember him: the sound of his voice, his movements, but especially the extraordinarily wonderful expression on his face at times. I cannot conceive that he is no more. The death of this boy, the fact that he no longer exists, is beyond my understanding. It seems to me that I have never loved anyone so strongly as him.”

The composer turned his tortured wound into a gift for the world: a genius overture that pays homage to a similarly doomed love affair.

The man behind the Bowl’s pyrotechnic wizardry

What more say about the spectacular 1812 Overture finale, other than to give credit to not only the musicians but to Show Producer Paul Souza, who masters the effervescent pyrotechnic spray that’s fired live to musical beats. The eruption of light and thunderous sound threatened the Bowl with lift-off.

Souza is a principal in the fifth-generation family business [Pyro Spectaculars by Souza](#).

You can watch an [LA Phil video](#) of how Souza works his wizardry at the Bowl each year. Souza calls the fireworks “whipped cream and cherries” that top the quintessential L.A. Hollywood Bowl experience.

If you missed the Tchaikovsky concerts, there are two more opportunities for boom and bang at the Bowl:

- September 7, 8, 9: [Fireworks Finale: Harry Connick, Jr.](#), 300th Birthday Celebration of New Orleans.
- September 30: [LA Phil 100 at the Bowl](#) (with fireworks). Gustavo Dudamel leads the LA Phil in a free concert featuring Katy Perry, Herbie Hancock, Kali Uchis, and Youth Orchestra Los Angeles (YOLA). Tickets are available through an online [sweepstakes](#), through September 2.

Hollywood Bowl [calendar](#),

Visit the on-premise [Hollywood Bowl museum](#) before a performance.

Photos courtesy of the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

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